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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001056

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AF/S FOR S. HILL  
SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [ZI](#)  
SUBJECT: NEW RELIGIOUS GROUP OFFERS WAY FORWARD

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell for reasons 1.5 b/d

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Summary  
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11. (SBU) During their visit to Harare, staffdel visitors met with the religious leaders spearheading the Christian Alliance (CA), a new opposition grouping that seeks to unite all anti-GOZ forces. Born out of the Church's efforts last year to help those affected by Operation Restore Order, the religious leaders said the CA was a grassroots organization that was more responsive to the needs of the people than the GOZ-appointed heads of denomination. According to the leaders, the CA is a neutral grouping of forces working for democratic reform and was already showing results with a successful conference in late July that brought together the leaders of the two MDC factions. End Summary.

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Congressional Staffers Visit Harare  
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12. (U) On a mission to assess the unfolding political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe, Majority Staffer Gregory Simpkins and Minority Staffer Pearl-Alice Marsh from the House of Representatives International Relations Committee and Minority Staffer Heather Flynn from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee visited Harare August 22-25. In addition to meeting with religious leaders, the staffdel met civil society leaders, labor union representatives, businesspeople, and government officials (Septels).

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New Church Alliance Emerges  
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13. (SBU) Methodist Church Bishop Levee Kadenge told the

staffdel that the CA was a loose grouping of Church leaders across the country that had come together to give Christians in Zimbabwe a common leadership and goal. Kadenge, who is also the CA's informal leader, said that Zimbabwean Christians from all denominations saw themselves as a catalyst for democratic change. Bulawayo Baptist Church Pastor Ray Motsi added that CA was born out the Church's collective support of those affected by Operation Restore Order. According to Methodist Church Pastor Vimbai Mugwidi, the group's success was in part due to the power of prayer, which in addition to being a means of communicating with God was also a useful mobilization and lobbying tool.

¶4. (SBU) Asked by the staffdel how the CA related to the GOZ-appointed denomination heads, Motsi said that the new grouping had deeper ties to the grassroots as opposed to the largely discredited traditional leaders. Motsi commented that the CA had the "mandate of the poor people." Church members were not fooled and recognized that the traditional religious leaders had been co-opted by ZANU-PF. In fact, Mosti said that many denomination heads were likely to be removed from office later this year by Church members unhappy with the leadership's overtures to government. Nonetheless, the government was pressuring the CA to work with pro-GOZ Church leaders and was intimidating those religious leaders who refused.

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Offers New Approach, Neutral Opposition Venue  
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¶5. (SBU) Motsi said the CA offered a new approach to bring Church members together in a common voice. Although the CA

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was concerned by political conditions, the grouping had no political agenda and only sought to address the needs of average Church goers. It was therefore a neutral force within the country's otherwise polarized opposition politics.

¶6. (SBU) Kadenge said that the CA had scored a major victory with the successful "Save Zimbabwe" Convention on July 29 that was attended by most of civic society and all of the opposition parties. Organizers initially planned for 300 attendees, but were quickly overwhelmed when 500 participants arrived. Kadenge told the staffers that only the Church had the moral standing required to bring together MDC faction leaders Morgan Tsvangirai and Arthur Mutambara at the same podium and produce the now famous photograph of the handshake.

¶7. (SBU) Commenting on the CA's next steps, the group's strategist Jonah Gokova said the Church leaders needed to take risks in order to change the impression of Zimbabweans as a passive people. Youth Pastor Useni Sibanda noted that participants in the CA march in Bulawayo in May carried Bibles, which offered them some protection from the usually intimidating police. Gokova said that the CA sought to mobilize the diaspora as both a source of funding and as another pro-reform voice. The group also had to confront regional perceptions of the conflict in Zimbabwe being purely a racial issue. The current image of Mugabe as a liberation war hero was misplaced, according to Gokova, as black Zimbabweans bore the brunt of the GOZ's abusive policies.

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Comment  
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¶8. (C) Against the backdrop of a fractured and inward-looking political opposition and a largely ineffectual civil society, the emergence of the Christian Alliance is a potentially significant political development. It is becoming an increasingly powerful voice for unity, reform, and - most importantly - action, whose reach and strength will be tested in the coming months.

19. (U) The staffdel did not have an opportunity to clear  
this cable before leaving Harare.  
DELL